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Lakes Corridor competes for 'Great Places' notice

By Russ Oechslein
Journal correspondent

OKOBOJI, Iowa – “Very pragmatic and very doable” is the way Amanda Styron described Thursday’s two-county Prairies & Waters of Dickinson & Clay Counties Great Places presentation.

The other judge, Bill Menner, told the group following the presentation, “You’re already a Great Place. You don’t need us to tell you that.”

The consortium spent an hour Thursday explaining the cooperation between the communities extending from Peterson, in the extreme southwest corner of Clay County to the northern reaches of Spirit Lake where the Spine (bicycle) Trail ends.

The Prairie Waters group is one of several such “multi-community” groups in the running for designation as one of three Great Places in Iowa.

Earlier Thursday Menner watched a presentation in nearby Emmetsburg.

“They took us out on the water. It was a little chilly. But it was a beautiful lake. Their concept for the lake is intriguing,” he noted. “It is the polar opposite of the lakes area’s presenta-

tion we just saw.”

Unique sense

The Prairies & Waters group’s concept is based on “a unique sense of place,” and the presentation opened with Spencer artisan Jim Scholey telling of some of the richest farmland, the world’s greatest county fair, the city parks and the many other amenities that are part of the area experience.

“We may be a well-kept secret,” Scholey explained. “But not for long.”

The Prairies & Waters project, which organizers said will take place even without help from the state if necessary, is aimed at educating everyone about the region.

In addition to Scholey, speakers included graphic artist Deidre Rosenboom; Martin Arthur, who spoke about the area’s rich social fabric; Corridor of Opportunity representative Ann Ditsworth, environmentalist Steve Anderson, and the Chamber’s Abbey Larson.

Sheryl Hall, representing the Sami Bedell Center for the Performing Arts, which is now under construction, spoke about the arts community, followed by Jeanne Bogenrief of the Bogenrief Studios (stained glass and

glass-blowing) also spoke about her family’s experience since locating in Spencer.

And the Curtis Dean/John Goede duo performed a “rap – not hip-hop but more like hip replacement or middle-age rap,” they admitted, with the refrain of “great-places dot com,” one of the promotional elements of the proposed project.

The group expects to begin distributing brochures and hopes to eventually have a magazine of information to distribute in the state’s five visitor centers. Organizers also plan a CD and computerized versions of self-guided tours of the historical and geological attractions in the area.

Following the presentation, Menner invited participants in the Prairies & Waters project to Iowa City for the official ceremonies recognizing the three Great Places winners Oct. 11. He remarked that he knew it was a long drive.

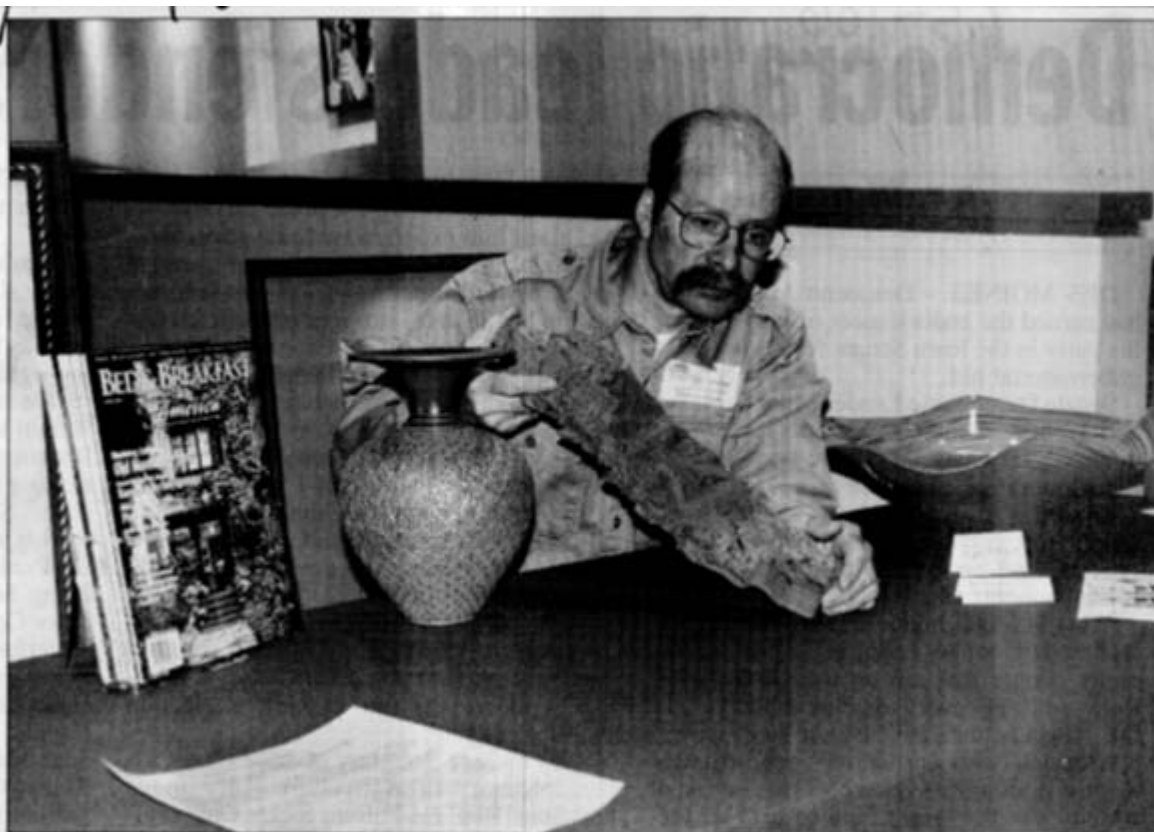
Herman Richter, one of the founding deans of the University of Okoboji who also emceed the presentation, was quick to explain that the drive would not be a problem.

Why? “Because,” said Richter, “the University of Iowa is a sister school.”





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Artisan **Jim Scholey** arranges a table for the Great Places judges who were in Okoboji Thursday to hear the presentation by the Praries & Wa-

ters of Dickinson & Clay counties. It is one of several multi-community groups in the running for designation. (Photo by Russ Oechslin)

